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## Current Opinion

### A Roman Catholic View of Higher Criticism

Some idea of the position which a Catholic scholar may frankly take toward biblical criticism is of especial interest in these days of modernism and papal reaction. Writing in the *Irish Catholic Quarterly*, for October, Father Pope holds firmly to the inspiration of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> There are, however, inconsistencies, even contradictions, in the accounts of the evangelists as notably in the matter of the cleansing of the temple. It no longer satisfies us to quote the verdict of this or that one of the Fathers, who, it is worth noting, felt and considered these very difficulties. It is altogether better, especially since we have nothing to fear—having the infallible declaration of the church that the Bible is inspired—to acquaint ourselves thoroughly, by literary study, with the traits, situation, and purpose of each evangelist, to the end that we may know, not indeed how these differences may be harmonized, but how it came about that different men, inspired to set forth divine truth, came to use such various frameworks for it, and how these frameworks compare in value. Such literary treatment of the gospels is not new, but as old as the Fathers. Inspiration, we must remember, need not be identified with infallibility, and there is more than one species of history. We must interpret the evangelists' presentations by the end for which they wrote, by their known historical acumen, or want of it, by their peculiar circumstances of place and time; that is, we must employ literary criticism, and putting ourselves in the writer's place, interpret him, as is only fair, from his own standpoint.

Thus the inspiration and divine origin of the Scripture is beyond controversy, being established by the declaration of the church; but these differences and discrepancies must be acknowledged and their explanation sought through literary criticism.

### Speaking against the Son of Man and Blaspheming the Holy Spirit

The above is the title of a brief article in the December number of the *Expositor* by James Denney. It is an interesting example of what might be called a brief literary-critical sermon such as may some day be acceptable in our churches.

Beginning with a critical discussion of the variations in the two fuller passages dealing with the subject, viz., Mark 3:20-35 and Matt. 12:27-32,

<sup>1</sup> F. H. Pope, "The Need of Literary Criticism of the Gospel Narratives," *Irish Catholic Quarterly*, October, 1907, pp. 438-57.

he dismisses explanations based on either reading to the exclusion of the other (Wellhausen, J. Weiss, Zahn). With Schmiedel he accepts the reading of Matthew, "Son of man," rather than that of Mark, "sons of men," as undoubtedly going back to Jesus. Denney's own suggestion, however, is that each evangelist has omitted something essential to the complete original. Matthew gives the proper contrast, viz., between blasphemy against the Son of man (not to be taken in the private, personal sense) and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, but fails to give the example of blasphemy against the Son of man; this Mark gives, viz., the petulant and inconsiderate exclamation of the friends of Jesus, "He is beside himself." Mark, on the other hand, according to the present reading, "sons of men," does not even mention blasphemy against the Son of man; this reading, "sons of men," however, is a corruption of the original "Son of man." In any case Mark does not specifically identify the remark of the friends as blasphemy against the Son of man. Both evangelists of course indicate the word of the Pharisees or scribes, "He hath Beelzebub," as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

In concluding Denney identifies the modern counterparts of these two blasphemies and warns against them. The first is an irreverent and even disrespectful way of speaking of Jesus as if he were one altogether like ourselves. The second is the virulent disposition which ascribes bad motives to good actions.

The suggestion of the article is interesting but hardly satisfying. The treatment is not thoroughgoing. Matt. 12:30 is still inept, in fact incorrect if taken to denote only moral neutrality, and we are still left wondering why the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as so interpreted should really be absolutely unforgivable.

#### **The Authenticity and Originality of the First Gospel**

In an article thus entitled (*Expositor*, October, 1907, pp. 339 f.) Rev. Arthur Carr, M.A., points out that recent criticism reaffirms the authenticity of the Second and Third Gospels, and casts doubt on the authorship of the First.

The well-known testimonies to Matthew's gospel given by Papias, Irenaeus, Origen, and Pantaenus are rehearsed and interpreted. The author, however, directs attention to the unnecessary identification of the *logia* and the *euangelion* and the assumption of translation into Greek. The recent Oxyrhynchus discoveries have proved disastrous to superficial conclusions and Mr. W. C. Allen in his recent commentary on Matthew adds to the confusion by the affirmation that the Gospel of Matthew

was neither originally written in Hebrew nor is it the work of an apostle.

Yet in the face of this array, Mr. Carr cannot cast aside a tradition so plain and uniform. Even that the Greek gospel is Matthaean rests for him on convincing ground. Matthew, "the scrupulous accountant," "the cosmopolitan," was certainly well equipped for the task. And how could a despised publican's name ever become attached to a gospel which he did not write? Disregarding the assertion of Blass, that the present gospel bears marks of the translator's hand, the writer still avers that the deduction of non-Matthaean authorship is combatable. If the apostle wrote in Hebrew to comfort absent converts, he might write in Greek to Greeks. Zahn and others place the emphasis on the *logia* in Hebrew. And indeed the employment of that word is exceptional.

Again, recent synoptic research seems to demonstrate the well-nigh complete incorporation of Mark in Matthew and Luke. Nevertheless, Mr. Carr does not think it proved that the First and Third Gospel writers deliberately copied from the Second. The accepted relationship between Mark 4:35-41 and its parallels is seriously questioned. On the other hand this parallelism in thought and difference in language, this similarity with striking dissimilarity, is exactly what one would expect from "an oral catechetical gospel"—that of Matthew and the other apostles at Jerusalem (Acts 2:42). Matthew presumably increased his *didache* from various sources, as from Peter in the Markan *logia*. Tradition is not lightly to be cast away; particularly must it be held a valuable guide in times and places where the materials of history are lacking.

In the second place the failure of true literary appreciation is affirmed. Matthew, "the gifted disciple of Christ," was no "mere 'editor' or 'redactor,' but an original writer of pre-eminent skill and influence." The common language of the three gospels is easily explicable by the *pietas* of loving disciples who treasured every word. The source-method in historical writings is scientific; many well-known citations have been incorporated with utmost accuracy by even classic writers.

"The test of originality is the impression created by the work and its influence on succeeding generations." In Matthew originality is plainly discoverable in his presentation of the facts and the purpose therein displayed. In an exceptional manner he meets the second supreme test. His book therefore rightly ranks as a worthy portion of the canon.